

# NEWS FOR NONPROFITS

## Montana arts groups part of Bright Spots report

Helicon Collaborative and the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation have released new a new research report: *Bright Spots Leadership in the Pacific Northwest*.

The introduction explains the report's premise:

"The operating environment for nonprofit cultural organizations today is daunting. Demographic shifts, changing participation patterns, evolving technology, increased competition for consumer attention, rising costs of doing business, shifts in the philanthropic sector and public funding, and the lingering recession form a stew of change and uncertainty. Every cultural organization is experiencing a combination of these shifts, each in its own way.

"Yet, while some organizations are struggling in this changing context, others are managing to stay healthy and dynamic while operating under the same conditions as their peers. These groups are observable exceptions, recognized by their peers as achieving success outside the norm in their artistic program, their engagement of community, and/or their financial stability. These are the 'bright spots' of the cultural sector.

"Who are they? What are they doing differently? What can we learn by studying their behavior?"

To explore these questions, the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation asked Helicon Collaborative to conduct a study of cultural groups in the Pacific Northwest. The project had two goals:

- To identify "bright spots," defined as cultural organizations that are successfully adapting to their changing circumstances without exceptional resources; and
- To see if these organizations share characteristics or strategies that can be replicated by others.

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The five "Bright Spot" principles are:

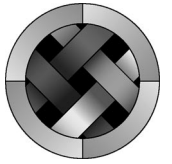
- **Animating purpose:** They have a clear purpose and a compelling vision, delivered through distinctive, relevant, high quality programs that excite people.
  - **Deeply engaged with community:** They operate in and of their communities, and they possess a deep understanding of their interconnectedness with others and their role as civic leaders.
  - **Evaluation and analysis:** They are sponges for information and are brutally realistic in assessing their circumstances, and yet they see possibilities where others don't.
  - **Plasticity:** They are nimble and flexible about how they realize their mission, and very little about the organizational form is too precious to change.
  - **Transparent leadership:** They distribute authority and responsibility across the organization and practice transparent decision-making.
- Research included interviews with 43 cultural leaders in the Pacific Northwest, including four Montanans: Laura Millin of the Missoula Art Museum; Arlynn Fishbaugh of the Montana Arts Council; Ed Noonan of the Myrna Loy Center; and Steven Lee of the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts.
- The final report includes a profile of the Archie Bray, which is recognized internationally as one of the foremost centers in the field of ceramic art.
- Here's an excerpt:
- "... We want to have the world's best ceramics artists at the center, and provide them with an environment that encourages their creativity and innovation. This intensive fo-

cus, which we refined in a strategic planning process about five years ago, keeps us from being pulled in too many directions and helps us make almost every decision. Happily, it is also enabling us to improve our programs, increase our revenue, and – through artists' word of mouth — raise our visibility and stature in our field."

One example illustrates the ways in which the Bray keeps its singular commitment to artists in focus in all its decision-making. "As you might imagine with a 26-acre campus containing buildings that are over 60 years old, and also a place that fires multiple kilns every day, we spend a huge amount of our budget on energy bills," says Lee. "In our effort to find savings, we partnered with local energy consultants and did a thorough analysis of our facilities and systems." The resulting efforts included increasing insulation, replacing inefficient lighting and heaters, and making a campus-wide effort to reduce energy use. They also replaced older kilns with more efficient and advanced models – an expensive choice that gave them "a triple return," says Lee.

"First and foremost, it improves our services to artists and students, which aligns with our mission. But it also lowers our costs and enhances our environmental responsibility all at once. Our artists are delighted, and have been taking advantage of not only the lower costs of firing, but also the new capabilities of the advanced technology. Through all of our efforts, we've reduced our carbon footprint as well as our utility bill by five percent three consecutive years."

Read the full report at [www.pgafoundations.com](http://www.pgafoundations.com)



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### Gaining support through storytelling

Stories are powerful ways to garner support for your cause.

Here are two ways to make the most of stories from consultant Richard Male & Associates:

#### Focus on 'why'

When you're closely involved in an organization, it's easy to get caught up on "what" your organization is doing.

But keep in mind that for donors the "why" and the "how" of your mission is probably more intriguing. Notice how often you repeat your standard "we do this and this program" speech. That's the "what."

#### Tell the 'best' story

Try to tell your nonprofit's best story. Keep in mind that you might not know it. Ask the nonprofit's staff to share their anecdotes with you.

Consider what the community would look like if your organization didn't exist.

For more ideas, go to: [richardmale.com/the-power-of-storytelling-2](http://richardmale.com/the-power-of-storytelling-2).

– From *Nonprofit Board Report*, January 2013

## Challenge America grants go to five organizations

Five Montana arts organizations were among 153 projects that received Challenge America Fast-Track grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. The Challenge America Fast-Track category offers support primarily to small- and mid-sized organizations for projects that extend the reach of the arts to populations whose opportunities to experience the arts are limited by geography, ethnicity, economics or disability.

Challenge America Fast-Track grants support two major outcomes: public engagement with diverse and excellent art and livability, or the strengthening of communities through the arts. These grants focus on high-quality, local projects including festivals, exhibits, performances, public murals and sculptures, environmental art and cultural tourism.

All Challenge America Fast-Track grants involve professionally trained, experienced artists and arts professionals. The review process for these applications is expedited and

all grants in this category are for the amount of \$10,000.

Montana recipients are:

- **Alberta Bair Theater** in Billings, to support "Mash It Up: Classical Cajun Hip Hop," a concert series with multiple outreach and education events. Artists, including Soul Street Dance Company and the Turtle Island String Quartet with Cajun fiddler Michael Doucet, perform and participate in outreach activities for audiences from the Rocky Mountain Northwest.
- **Billings Symphony Society** for a concert series and related outreach activities celebrating American, Latin and British symphonic music. Guest artists, composer Jennifer Higdon and pianist Michael Chertock, participate in outreach activities including master classes, a music seminar with as many as 800 fifth-grade students, pre- and post-concert discussions, and an open rehearsal.
- **Glacier Symphony and Chorale** in Ka-

ispell, for the annual Festival Amadeus. Local residents and youth participants from the North Valley Music School have the opportunity to see open rehearsals and performances and participate in artist-led master classes.

- **Great Falls Symphony Association**, to support performances and outreach activities featuring percussionist Evelyn Glennie. In addition to a public performance with the orchestra, the project includes a program for residents at the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind, an open rehearsal for university and high school students, and workshops taking place at one or two high schools.

- **Whitefish Theatre Co.** in Whitefish, to support International Guitar Night, featuring acoustic guitarists Brian Gore, Martin Taylor, Solorazaf and Celso Machado. The project includes musicians from Brazil, Madagascar and Great Britain, and is designed to be a unique, culturally diverse event for an isolated rural community.

## Watermedia (from previous page)

The judging committee withdrew two paintings from the show because they didn't meet the criteria established in the prospectus, and several others were almost disqualified. "It's so important to read the prospectus thoroughly," said Watermedia chair Michele Beck.

This year's event also included a quick draw prior to the awards banquet on Oct. 6. Participating painters were Margo Voermans, Karen Leigh, Sallie Bowen and Janet McGahan. Proceeds from the auction, a silent auction and raffle help the organization bring top national artists to Montana each year to judge the exhibit and offer a workshop.

Planning is well underway for Watermedia 2013, slated for this October at the Bigfork Museum of Art and History. Sue Archer is juror for the exhibit and will offer a workshop Oct. 3-6. A prospectus is available, and entry deadline is May 1; visit [www.montanawatercolorsociety.org](http://www.montanawatercolorsociety.org) for details.

## Answers to proxy questions

The Montana Arts Council finds that questions on the subject of proxy voting on boards of directors come up at times. Here is some good advice, offered by Jane Rhodes of the State of Montana Professional Development Center in Helena.

Montana law does not prohibit proxies like some states. Proxies are allowed unless specifically stipulated in the bylaws. They create problems when some of the questions below aren't addressed in your bylaws (if allowed):

- How will you count proxies in determining a quorum?
- Will the proxy be a general proxy or a limited proxy?

A general proxy means the person holding the proxy voted as he/she sees fit on all issues and motions (with discretion to cast a vote based on information discussed in the meeting).

A limited proxy is a signed proxy where the signer stipulates the way the holder must

vote on specific issues (if a limited proxy is given, then any discussion on the topic during the meeting will have no bearing on the limited proxy vote).

- Who is in charge of validating the proxy?
- What is the procedure for counting the proxies with voting members present?
- Is the proxy valid for one meeting, or does it expire after a short period of time?
- Is the proxy revocable? Can someone who has been allowed a general proxy change their mind? How will that affect the vote?

Robert's Rules of Order does not forbid proxy voting, but it does not encourage it either. Here is its recommendation: "As you consider allowing proxies, remember why organizations have meetings – so members meet face-to-face, discuss and debate issues, and arrive at a reasonable agreement through a vote."